

How Jesus Treated the Woman of Samaria.

This is one of the most prominent and important instances of conviction and conversion recorded in the whole of the Gospel, and needs our closest investigation.

Jesus is going to Galilee, but chooses* to go through Samaria as being the shorter route, and perhaps also as a protest against the bigotry that led the ordinary Jew to take longer journeys around the hated territory.

He may possibly also have desired to visit the scenes of the patriarchs, and drink from the well that Jacob had dug.

Now here is an opportunity of recognizing the omniscience of Jesus, if all what followed was the result of a carefully devised plan.

To use a common and very modern phrase, we may say, "by chance" he sat at Jacob's well to rest, while his disciples went to buy food near by.

"By chance," for it was not the usual hour of frequenting the well, a woman came out to draw water.

There seemed to be little order in her life—as little regard for hours as for morals. Confusion in one part of life breeds it in all, and one who violates the leading laws of life will be negligent and unobservant in its detail.

It may be, however, she came at the hour of noon, instead of at morning and evening, as was the custom, in order to avoid the throng that looked on her askance; for shame was not yet dead in her breast.

If this supposition is true, which it appears from the sequel to be, then this woman was deep enough in the slough of evil that she hated it—perhaps had never loved it—and was capable of rescue. And so the pitying, helping heart of Jesus went out to her; and not only his heart, but his hand.

See how first he awoke her interest. She had come to the well in a listless, every-day mood, thinking of nothing in particular, perhaps somewhat cast down by the long burden of her ill-regulated life—a dumb soul. She needs to be interested—aroused. It is useless to attempt to insert religious truth into a mind until it is interested. Interest is something to be won, and often it can be best won by indirect means.

So Christ introduced a subject remote from his ultimate object. It was water—water that bubbled in the well below.

He was thirsty, and she had the means of supplying his wants. He asked for draught from her pitcher.

Thus they stood on a common plane, yet how far apart! And how far off was he from his object!

He sets her to doing what she can, stirs her still human heart by laying on it a humane service, and so calls into action whatever of good is left in her.

Is not this a grand lesson? The best way to interest those whom we want to benefit, is to get them to do something for some one—something of benefit. Let them see that they can be of use.

Your child cannot be led at once into the great forms of benevolence—giving, without hope of return, self denial and suffering for another; but it can be led to the simple forms of household service—the helpful errand, the daily task of the house or street. Teach it to do the duty and render the service it can comprehend, and so prepare the way for higher ones.

So here Jesus set the moral nature of this woman into action. The long-closed door of duty turned a little on its rusty hinges, and her poor soul looked through into the blessed world without.

Christ deepened her interest by disarming her prejudices. He was a Jew, and she was a Samaritan, and the two peoples had no dealings—would not eat nor drink together.

Perhaps she, poor creature as she was, would not have accepted a cup of water from his hand, though she would not give one to him.

The request seemed to pique her curiosity. "Who and what is this Jew, that he should take water from my hand?" And so, as he drank it—the pure water from the well of their common ancestor, that met their common need—all her prejudices were drowned, as it were, in the depths below.

"Surely, he does not despise me, and why should I hate him?" Christ thus drew her a long way toward his own height of Charity. Confidence and mutual respect—these are the necessary conditions in all teaching and wielding of influence.

Christ did not say to this woman: "You need have no prejudice against me; I do not think with my countrymen on this matter;" but by an act he both said and proved it. Words are cheap, and language hides as well as reveals thought; but action tells the truth and carries conviction.

Christ deepened the interest of this woman by getting her to do him a favor. To render favors is not always the best way of securing influence over another. That indeed, is necessary, but continual favors without reciprocation may turn one into a dull and at last, an ungrateful dependant. You may love and serve your child beyond measure; but if you do not require it to serve you it will not love you as it ought, and the process will train it into unloving selfishness. There is a saying that "If you would bind a friend to you, get him to do a service"—a maxim that can be used in a selfish, but also in a right and wise way.

Christ goes on and deepens this genuine interest of the woman by awakening in her a profound and puzzling curiosity in regard to himself. So far, he has approached her on the simple ground of a common humanity, but he wishes to lift her above this plane into the region of moral and spiritual apprehension.

He next tells her something very true and great, but something that she cannot understand, nor does he expect her to understand it at once. Do any of us fully understand it? "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." It is mere words to her, that but tease and perplex her—awakening at first a sense of absurdity, but going deeper than that, and suggesting the possibility of some other meaning.

While she played with the thought of a water that would forever quench her thirst and save her the trouble of coming hither again, there was dawning upon her a dim sense of things great and good, faint echoes of inarticulate voices in her own heart. For the divine and spiritual never wholly die out in any of us, especially when we have once felt it. For when we come near the good and the pure, we rise up to meet them. When Jesus touched upon spiritual things he drew out all that was spiritual.

Observe how profound was his method. He did not begin with an alphabetical lesson of plain, immediate duty. She no doubt knew well enough what was her duty. Her virtuous neighbors often enough reminded her of that. Conscience and mind were not yet sufficiently enlisted to listen patiently to plain, direct lessons. So Christ takes her at once into the midst of the loftiest and most mysterious truths. Himself the gift of God, living water quenching the thirst of the spirit forever—is there anything higher, anything more mysterious? Do we understand it even now? How many of us hear it with as vague a sense of its meaning as did this woman? Yet this is her first lesson in religion.

He did not give this lesson that it might be readily understood. His object now was to get possession of her mind and imagination. So he entraps her, as it were, by the mysterious and the great. By baffling her thought he provokes thought. By suggesting the mysterious he starts her imagination, and so kindles her whole nature into keen inquiry. She is now enlisted and follows him eagerly. She has been led away unconsciously into the world of religious thought.

This is another lesson to us. It is not always best to teach a plain lesson that can be easily understood. Often it is better to teach things that cannot be understood, but that have the power to awe and surprise us. The mysterious interests and enkindles, it starts the imagination and induces thought and breeds veneration and awe.

But Jesus has not yet sufficiently wound about her his gracious coils. He has enlisted her in himself, and stirred the dull embers of her spiritual nature; but he needs a larger field for what he is

about to say, and so turns away from himself to her and her life.

Again he uses the indirect method. He does not directly charge her with wrong. He always treats the human soul delicately except when it was false, and then he blasted it with thunderbolts of denunciation, because for hypocrisy there is no remedy but a thunderbolt. He could startle men with an epithet when it was necessary, but the poor, weak, pitiful, every-day sinner he treated as one treats a sick child with kind and tender touch and tearful voice. But in this case he was wise as well as delicate. If he had accused her of sin he might have provoked a denial, and driven her into antagonism.

Instead of this he led her to self-accusation. He reveals that he has a knowledge of her history equal to her own. This was a complete victory and she bowed to him as a prophet.

She does not like to think of her poor, sinful life—who does? She, therefore, takes refuge in the national controversy: Girazim or Jerusalem, which is the right place to worship?

Christ does not draw her back to herself, and urge repentance and reformation. These are needful; but there are more important things for her to know than her duty—namely, something that shall teach and inspire duty.

So he indulges her vain question and answers it. But having settled that in her mind he leads her away from her small questioning into a larger view of the subject. She has given him an opportunity to say what she is now ready to hear, and what she most needs. So follow those eternal words that have chanted themselves into the faith of all generations: "God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

This is a definition of God and a description of worship. It sweeps away idolatry, and makes truth—reality—the path to God.

"But these things are great and difficult," cries the woman. "When Messiah comes, he will tell us all about them." "I that speak unto thee am he." What a revelation to her poor, now struggling heart. The Messiah! And she had given him water to drink! She—first of the Samaritans—had heard his great message.

So she hastened back to the city, from which she had come a woman of shame, but now an angel of annunciation.

Let us not forget the last point—namely, Christ's use of a small view or question as the basis of a larger view. It is, at first sight, discouraging to find so many persons holding the truth in a small way, and occupying themselves with minor questions and the mere detail of a Bible truth.

This woman raised a trivial question. Jesus answered it, but at the same time swept it aside, and strode on to the greater truth that covered it. We should never allow the teaching of God's word to sink into useless details. Always press for the larger view. Let us leap on to the eternal principle which every circumstance in his word contains.

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Fruitfulness is an evidence of Christian vitality. When the seed of the kingdom has been sown in the heart, it will bring forth fruit in the life. The Psalmist represents the good man as bringing forth fruit in his season. And Christ ordained that his disciples should bring forth fruit, and that their fruit should remain. The apostle Paul assures us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Wherever these fruits are found, they afford evidence of the indwelling life and power of godliness in the soul.

One night during the late war, the army was encamped in front of the enemy, when there was seen a gleaming light among the trees in front of the position. They thought it was the enemy's camp fires, and began firing with their batteries upon the light. But soon the moon rose up from behind some trees, and they saw that they had been directing their artillery against the radiant queen of night? And so upon Christianity infidelity rains its shot and shell, but it is like firing upon the moon in her inaccessible splendor.—Rev. Edward Judson.